

---

American Prisoners of War in Korea: A Second Look at the "Something New in History" Theme

Author(s): H. H. Wubben

Source: *American Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring, 1970), pp. 3-19

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711669>

Accessed: 03-03-2015 01:59 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Johns Hopkins University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

H. H. WUBBEN  
*Oregon State University*

# American Prisoners of War in Korea: A Second Look at the “Something New in History” Theme

AMERICANS HAVE LONG BEEN INTRIGUED BY SPECULATIONS ABOUT THEIR national character. In particular they have been receptive to assessments which credit them with immunity against certain human frailties, an immunity not possessed by most other peoples. Out of the Korean War came a controversy which impinged annoyingly upon such assessments and which provided grist for the mill of those who now preferred to believe that in recent decades the character had deteriorated.

Throughout the conflict reports coming out of North Korea indicated that the communists were subjecting American prisoners of war to a re-education process popularly described as “brainwashing.” Prisoner returnees during Operation Little Switch in May and Operation Big Switch in August and September 1953 corroborated some of these reports. But it also became clear that such re-education was largely ineffective. Nevertheless, 21 prisoners chose not to return home. A few who did return admitted that they were “progressives,” that is, men partially converted by the Chinese re-education program. Some who did not confess to such leanings faced accusations from other prisoners that they had taken the “progressive” line.

In addition it became apparent that a number of men had engaged in collaborative or criminal behavior detrimental to the welfare of their fellows. Consequently, the armed services made special efforts to find out what had happened. Psychiatrists and psychologists interviewed the newly-freed prisoners during the repatriation process and on the journey home. Intelligence officers also interviewed them, compiling dossiers on each

man. Information acquired by these specialists eventually provided the data upon which subsequent formal studies of the prisoners and their behavior in captivity were based.

In 1955 came the official government view of the POW behavior issue, the report of the Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War. But the committee's judgment was hardly definitive. On the one hand, the group declared, "the record [of the prisoners] seems fine indeed . . . they cannot be found wanting." On the other it concluded, "The Korean story must never be permitted to happen again."<sup>1</sup> Then in 1956 the Army issued a training pamphlet on the subject of POW behavior. It was even more ambiguous. Readers learned that the Chinese "lenient policy" designed to lessen resistance "resulted in little or no active resistance to the enemy's indoctrination." Later, however, they read that the "large majority . . . resisted the enemy in the highest tradition of the service and of our country."<sup>2</sup>

Findings of the major formal studies, financed by or undertaken by the armed services in most cases, are much more satisfying to the scholar who desires more consistency in both raw material and analysis. These include research projects done for the Department of the Army, the Surgeon General's Office, the Air Force and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research.<sup>3</sup> Also engaged in examination of POW experiences was the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology. The studies never achieved wide circulation although the research scientists who engaged in them reported their substance in professional journals.<sup>4</sup> Eventually one

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, *POW: the Fight Continues After the Battle, the Report of the Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War* (Washington, D.C., 1955), pp. vi, 32.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of the Army, *Communist Interrogation, Indoctrination and Exploitation of Prisoners of War*, Army Pamphlet No. 30-191 (Washington, D.C., 1956), pp. 21, 24.

<sup>3</sup>Examples of these respectively are the following. Julius Segal, *Factors Related to the Collaboration and Resistance Behavior of U.S. Army POWs in Korea* (Washington, D.C., Human Resources Research Office, George Washington University, 1956, HumRRO Tech. Rep. 33); Edgar H. Schein, W. E. Cooley and Margaret T. Singer, *A Psychological Follow-Up of Former Prisoners of War of the Chinese Communists, Parts I and II* (Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1961, 1962); Albert D. Biderman, *Communist Techniques of Coercive Interrogation* (Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, Air Force Personnel and Training Research Center, 1956, AFPTRC Development Report TN-56-132); Lee B. Grant, "Operation Big Switch: Medical Intelligence Processing" (Washington, D.C., Walter Reed Army Medical Center, mimeographed document, n.d.). Also Edgar H. Schein, *Some Observations on the Chinese Indoctrination Program for Prisoners of War* (Washington, D.C., Army Medical Service Graduate School, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 1955, AMSGS-37-55).

<sup>4</sup>Major publications in scholarly journals include these: Albert Biderman, "Communist Attempts to Elicit False Confessions from Air Force Prisoners of War," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, XXXIII (1957), 616-25. Edgar H. Schein, "The Chinese Indoctrination Program for Prisoners of War: a Study of Attempted Brainwashing,"

scholarly book-length treatment appeared, Albert Biderman's *March to Calumny*. Biderman, a sociologist who was active in several of these projects, demolished in a convincing manner those interpretations which accused the prisoners of being singularly deficient in the attributes expected of American servicemen unfortunate enough to become prisoners of war.<sup>5</sup>

The work of such specialists, however, has had little impact compared with that of those whose reports convey a largely, if not exclusively, negative version of the prisoners' actions during captivity. That version, in general, declares that American prisoners of war in Chinese and North Korean hands were morally weak and uncommitted to traditional American ideals. Consequently, some, though not a majority, were infected to a degree with the virus of communism. Furthermore, they were undisciplined. They were unwilling to aid each other in their travail. And they succumbed too easily under limited duress or no duress at all to the pressures of their captors to engage in collaborative behavior, including informing on each other. Their death rate, 38%, was the highest in history, and most deaths resulted from "give-up-itis" and lack of concern for one another among the prisoners themselves, not from communist mistreatment. Also, no prisoners successfully escaped from communist prison camps, a "first" in U.S. military experience. Other nationality groups, particularly the Turks, successfully resisted communist blandishments, and only the Marines among the Americans consistently adhered to patterns of honorable conduct. Finally, the POWs in Korea were the first Americans in captivity to so act, a "fact" which calls for a reassessment of mid-century American values and the culture which spawned them.<sup>6</sup>

Among those who accepted this as history, in part or in whole, were President Dwight Eisenhower, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. Political scientist Anthony

---

*Psychiatry*, XIX (May 1956), 149-72. Schein, Winfred F. Hill, Harold L. Williams and Ardie Lubin, "Distinguishing Characteristics of Collaborators and Resisters Among American Prisoners of War," *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*, LV (1957), 197-201. See also special issue, "Brainwashing," *Journal of Social Issues*, XIII, No. 3 (1957); and Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, *Methods of Forceful Indocination: Observations and Interviews* (New York, GAP Publications Office, 1957, GAP Symposium No. 4).

<sup>5</sup>Albert D. Biderman, *March to Calumny: the Story of American POW's in the Korean War* (New York, 1963). Anyone who has investigated this subject owes Biderman a considerable debt, as the writer of this article readily acknowledges. William L. White's *The Captives of Korea: an Unofficial White Paper* (New York, 1957), is a good journalistic treatment of the subject.

<sup>6</sup>Presumed to be most guilty of poor performance were Army and Air Force prisoners, although it is allowed that the latter, beginning in 1952, were subjected to special attention by the Chinese who wanted germ warfare confessions. Because Air Force POWs underwent treatment which was unique in many aspects in the American captivity experience, and because it is the conduct of ground force troops which has been most called into question, this article deals primarily with the latter group of POWs.

Bouscaren saw the "record" as evidence that American education had flunked a significant test.<sup>7</sup> Another critic of education, Augustin Rudd, viewed the prisoner performance as evidence that the chickens of progressive education had come home to roost.<sup>8</sup> The editors of *Scouting* magazine in 1965 cited it in urging continued efforts to implant the ideals of the Boy Scout Code among youth in that organization.<sup>9</sup> And as late as 1968, California educator and political figure Max Rafferty employed it in some of his campaign literature during his senatorial race.<sup>10</sup>

These individuals, however, have not been so influential as two others in promoting this "history." They are the late Eugene Kinkead, a free-lance writer, and Lt. Col. William E. Mayer, one of the psychiatrists who participated in the interviewing of the repatriates. Kinkead's major contribution was a book entitled *In Every War But One* which sold around fifteen thousand copies.<sup>11</sup> Col. Mayer's contributions, mainly public addresses, have won even wider circulation than Kinkead's, thanks to the tape recorder and the mimeograph.<sup>12</sup> Both men have modified from time to time their indictment of the prisoners, if not of recent trends in American society. Mayer, for instance, toward the end of one of his speeches said, "Finally, the great majority of men didn't become communists, didn't suffer any kind of moral breakdown, no matter what the communists did to them."<sup>13</sup> But by then the negative point had been so strongly stressed that few listeners were aware of his significant caveat.

That they were not aware resulted from a number of circumstances. Many conservative Americans were disgruntled at the absence of a de-

<sup>7</sup>Anthony T. Bouscaren, "Korea, Test of American Education," *Catholic World*, CLXXXIII (Apr. 1956), 24-27.

<sup>8</sup>Augustin G. Rudd, *Bending the Twig: the Revolution in Education and its Effect on Our Children* (New York, 1957), p. 222.

<sup>9</sup>Rex Lucas, "Personally Speaking," *Scouting*, LIII (Jan. 1965), 3.

<sup>10</sup>See also Max Rafferty, "What's Happened to Patriotism?" *Reader's Digest*, LXXIX (Oct. 1961), 108.

<sup>11</sup>Eugene Kinkead, *In Every War But One* (New York, 1959). Also see Kinkead, "A Reporter at Large: the Study of Something New in History," *The New Yorker* (Oct. 26, 1957), pp. 102-53. Biderman's *March to Calumny* is a devastating examination of the Kinkead book, but it sold only six thousand copies and is little known except to those who have made a serious effort to probe beneath the surface of the subject.

<sup>12</sup>William E. Mayer, tape of speech before San Francisco Commonwealth Club, n.d. See, also, interview with Mayer, "Why Did Many GI Captives Cave In?" *U.S. News and World Report*, XL (Feb. 24, 1956), 56-72; and Mayer, "The Moral Imperative: the Survival of Freedom," *Vital Speeches*, XIX (Feb. 15, 1963), 266-70. One of Mayer's leading critics has been Colorado University anthropologist John Greenway. See his article, "The Colonel's Korean 'Turncoats,'" *Nation* (Nov. 10, 1962), 302-5. Ironically, Greenway is editor of *The Journal of Folklore*. See also, Louis J. West, "Psychiatry, 'Brainwashing,' and the American Character," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, CXX (Mar. 1964), 842-50.

<sup>13</sup>Transcript of speech, "The New Weapon of Brainwashing," given at Tamalpais High School (California), n.d.

cisive American victory in the war. They blamed communist subversion at home for the result. This subversion in turn they blamed on “socialistic” influences originating in the 1930s which, they charged, had weakened the capacity and will of home, church and school to develop good character among the nation’s youth. Thus, the prisoners served as evidence to verify their beliefs. Many liberals accepted the prisoners as examples of societal sickness also, although they rejected the communist subversion theme. They claimed that American materialism lay at the root of the problem. Both groups professed to view the prisoners with pity rather than scorn, as men who through no fault of their own were simply unfortunate products of a society on the verge of decay. Both were impressed by Mayer’s credentials and the literate, entertaining manner in which he employed tendentious illustrations to document a general picture of moral and morale breakdown resulting from defective pre-captivity nurture. Given these general dispositions on the part of many Mayer listeners, it is no wonder that they let his muted but significant qualifier slip by. They weren’t interested in it. Finally many Americans, including academicians who would ordinarily have demanded more intellectual rigor in their own disciplines, simply took Mayer’s and Kinhead’s revelations at face value because they seemed to meet the test of reasonableness.

Historians have long known a great deal about the behavior of Americans in prisoner camps prior to the Korean War, particularly about prison behavior in World War II camps. As Peter Karsten wrote in the spring of 1965 issue of *Military Affairs*, the motivation and conduct of American servicemen, in or out of prison camps, have been a source of concern from the American Revolution to the present.<sup>14</sup> George Washington had numerous unkind words for defectors, mutineers and those of his forces who lacked “public spirit.” The activities of the reluctant warriors of the War of 1812, the defectors and the short-term volunteers who departed the service when their time was up—if not sooner—wherever they were during the Mexican and Civil Wars, are a matter of record. “Give-up-itis,” called “around the bends,” was not unknown at Andersonville and Belle Isle. Draft dodgers and deserters numbered over 170,000 in World War I. By the early 1940s, “around the bends” had several new names, the most common being “Bamboo disease” and “fence complex.”

Even in a “popular” war, World War II, the Army worried about the lack of dedication among its troops. Indoctrination programs were overhauled and beefed up with negligible success. A Social Science Research Council team which analyzed data collected by the Army during the war,

<sup>14</sup>Peter Karsten, “The American Democratic Citizen Soldier: Triumph or Disaster?” *Military Affairs*, XXX (Spring 1965), 34–40.

concluded that the average soldier "gave little concern to the conflicting values underlying the military struggle . . . [and] Although he showed a strong but tacit patriotism, this usually did not lead him in his thinking to subordinate his personal interests to the furtherance of ideal aims and values."<sup>15</sup>

As to moral and morale breakdown under severe conditions, two military physicians reported that in Japanese POW camps "moral integrity could be pretty well judged by inverse ratio to one's state of nutrition." And, they added, "Although some of these prisoners sublimated their cravings by giving aid to their fellows, there was, in general, a lowering of moral standards. Food was often obtained by devious means at the expense of other prisoners." Though a buddy system did function to some extent, particularly among small cliques who shared both companionship and food, there were few group activities, and most men tended to be taciturn and seclusive. Being unable to defy their captors and survive, they expressed considerable verbal resentment toward each other. In particular they disparaged their own officers and their behavior.<sup>16</sup> Another physician, who was a prisoner himself in the Philippines and Japan, wrote that most POWs, whether sick or well, suffered periods of apathy or depression which, if not countered forcefully, would lead to death. "Giving up" occurred earliest and easiest among younger men as in Korea. In a sentence strikingly reminiscent of the Kinkead-Mayer critique, except that he omitted the "something new in history" theme, the physician wrote, "Failures in adjustment were most apparent in the 18-to-23-year-old group who had little or no previous experience and much overprotection. These men demonstrated marked inability to fight physical diseases and the initial shock of depression of captivity."<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Harold Wolff, a consultant to the Advisory Committee, reported that in World War II German prison camps where the pressures were much less severe than in Japanese and Korean camps, about 10% of the Americans "offered remarkably little resistance, if not outright collaboration." Wolff also noted that the escape record of Americans in World War II was not exceptional. Less than a dozen prisoners of the Japanese out of twenty-five to thirty thousand men escaped from permanent camps, all in the Philippines. Less than one hundred out of ninety-four thousand

<sup>15</sup>Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath* (New York [1965], 1949), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup>Stewart Wolf and Herbert S. Ripley, "Reactions Among Allied Prisoners of War Subjected to Three Years of Imprisonment and Torture by the Japanese," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, CIV (July 1947), 184-86.

<sup>17</sup>J. E. Nardini, "Survival Factors in American Prisoners of War of the Japanese," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, CIX (Oct. 1952), 244-46.



Americans captured by the Nazis successfully escaped from camps, of which less than half returned to Allied control.<sup>18</sup>

Autobiographical accounts of former World War II prisoners also tell much which shows that the Korean POW behavior was not unique. Edward Dobran, an airman held by the Germans, reported that a G.I. mess hall crew at his camp took care of itself well but skimmed on the rest of the men's rations. Nor could those who apportioned food in the squads be trusted to do their job honestly more than a few days at a time. Dobran concluded, "In a place such as this, every man is strictly for himself. This sort of living and hardships showed what a human being is really made of. If you didn't look out for yourself here, nobody else did."<sup>19</sup>

Physician Alfred Weinstein's book-length recital of prison-camp life in the Philippines and Japan tells about a Marine officer's extensive collaboration with the Japanese and about the stealing of medicine by the same officer and some enlisted men medics at Cabanatuan. Some POW mechanics and truck drivers, put to work by the Japanese, lived high, using their positions to smuggle from Manila desperately needed food and medicine which they then sold for outrageous prices to the rest of the prisoners who were in dire need of both. Nor was Weinstein complimentary about behavior in an officers' ward at a prisoner hospital at Cabanatuan. These officer-patients demanded so many special privileges, food and medicine because of their rank that the senior American officer had to break up the group by distributing the men throughout the other wards.<sup>20</sup> Also not complimentary about the self-seeking of a few officers incarcerated in Japan is Hugh Myers in a recently published memoir. Myers has described how four veteran Navy chiefs from the garrison at Guam assumed control over prison life at one stage in his POW experience when it became apparent that the officers were too concerned about their privileges, too inexperienced, or both, to do the job fairly or well.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, in all the accounts discussed above which were written by men who had been POWs there is no tendency to denigrate American civilization because of the failings of a greater or lesser number of men in prison camps. Nor is it assumed by them that men under conditions of stress will uniformly conduct themselves in exemplary fashion. Weinstein, for instance, wrote, "Hard living, disease, and starvation made heroes

<sup>18</sup>Harold G. Wolff, "Every Man His Breaking Point—(?) the Conduct of Prisoners of War," *Military Medicine*, CXXV (Feb. 1960), 89–90.

<sup>19</sup>Edward Dobran, *P.O.W.: the Story of an American Prisoner of War During World War II* (New York, 1953), pp. 67–72.

<sup>20</sup>Alfred Weinstein, *Barbed-Wire Surgeon* (New York, 1948), pp. 111, 113, 120, 161.

<sup>21</sup>Hugh M. Myers, *Prisoner of War: World War II* (Portland, Ore., 1965), pp. 35, 54, 73–74.



out of few men. More frequently does it make animals out of men who, in the normal course of living would go through life with a clean slate."<sup>22</sup>

Two aspects of the Korean POW story, then, should be of particular interest to the historian. First, there is the fact that a poorly understood historical experience is interpreted in such a way that it makes a thoroughly inaccurate comparison between Americans past and Americans present. Second, there is the acceptance by the general public of this "nonhistory" as history, largely without the aid of historians. Critical to the development of these two aspects is the misuse of the data derived from the prisoners' experiences. This data, largely collected at the time of their repatriation, was not originally intended to provide raw material for behavioral or historical studies per se. It was, rather, gathered with the intention of providing information for possible court martial action against men accused of collaboration or criminal activity while in captivity, to identify men who merited commendation and decoration, and to identify repatriates who needed psychiatric care.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, the generally accepted percentage classification of POWs by behavior, 5% resistor, 15% participator (or collaborator), and 80% middlemen, needs to be viewed more as suggestive than as absolutely definitive.<sup>24</sup> Biderman, for instance, reports that placement of a POW in the collaborator category required only that he be "accused of committing isolated but serious acts of collaboration" which could be corroborated. Placement in this category remained firm, moreover, even if the prisoner were otherwise regarded as having been a hard-case resistor throughout his captivity, as some of them were.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the evidence that the POWs were peculiarly weak in moral fibre, uncommitted to American ideals and ignorant of the institutions and history of their country, a change in perspective is revealing. If one accepts the idea that it takes moral fibre to resist, actively *and* passively, ideological conversion attempts by a captor who is very concerned

<sup>22</sup>Weinstein, *Barbed-Wire Surgeon*, p. 229.

<sup>23</sup>Edgar Schein, "Epilogue: Something New in History?" in special issue, "Brainwashing," *Journal of Social Issues*, pp. 56–57. Biderman, *March to Calumny*, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup>Julius Segal, "Correlates of Collaboration and Resistance Behavior Among U.S. Army POWs in Korea," in "Brainwashing," *Journal of Social Issues*, pp. 32, 34. Segal, author of the Human Resources Research Office study (HumRRO report), notes these limitations in the data but tends to regard them as less important than Schein, "Epilogue," pp. 56–59, and Biderman, *March to Calumny*, pp. 205–14.

<sup>25</sup>The post-repatriation plight of Cpl. Joseph Hammond, one of the most obstinate POWs, from the Chinese point of view, is instructive. See William Peters, "A Man's Fight for His Reputation," *Redbook* (Apr. 1958), 46–47, 89–94. Letter to author, Oct. 28, 1966, from Kathleen Lucey, legislative assistant to Rep. Thomas L. Ashley (Ohio), with enclosure: Ashley statement before House Judiciary Committee urging passage of a private bill in behalf of Hammond. Hammond's resistance record is touched on also in a British POW account, Francis S. Jones, *No Rice for Rebels* (London, 1956), pp. 200–1. Biderman, *March to Calumny*, pp. 63–66.

about “correct thoughts” and who has overwhelming power which he uses as it suits his purpose, then one must grant that most prisoners had it to some meaningful degree. The Chinese regarded passive resistance to indoctrination, including “going through the motions,” as “insincere” and “stupid,” if not actually reactionary behavior, as many of the scholars of POW behavior have noted. They made strenuous efforts to overcome such “insincerity” and “stupidity.” But in May of 1952 they abandoned compulsory indoctrination, keeping classes only for the relatively small number of progressives. Their extensive efforts had resulted in disappointing returns among their stubborn captives.

Many prisoners did supply evidence that there was often a lack of discipline in their ranks. Autobiographies, both American and British, speak of a dog-eat-dog system prevailing during several of the “death marches” and in the temporary holding camps during the harsh winter of 1950–51. They also tell of prisoners in need being refused assistance by other prisoners. In these respects, however, they differ little from World War II POW memoirs which described the same kind of reaction to stress during those periods in which captivity conditions were the worst. Conversely, those who give testimony to such animalistic behavior also testify to behavior of a different order. Morris Wills, one of the original 21 who refused repatriation, only to return over a decade later, has written: “You really can’t worry about the other fellow; you are at the line of existence yourself. If you go under that, you die. You would help each other if you could. Most would try; I wouldn’t say all.”<sup>26</sup>

“Reactionary” Lloyd Pate wrote in a similar, if more positive, vein. “After the first shock of our capture wore off, the G.I.’s with me on those Korean mountain roads began to act like soldiers this country could be proud of.” He told of prisoners helping each other to keep up the pace when dropping out meant death; and he credited two such good Samaritans with saving his life.<sup>27</sup> Captive British journalist Philip Deane in one poignant passage revealed the context within which many prisoners faced life or death under brutal march conditions. In it he inadvertently answers many who charge that the prisoners “shamefully” abandoned their weaker fellows en route. A young American lieutenant, faced with a bitter choice, allowed five men to drop out, in effect “abandoning” them, contrary to the orders of the North Korean march commander. He could not, he told the North Korean, order them carried because “That meant condemning the carriers to death from exhaustion.” For this decision, the lieutenant’s captors executed him on the spot.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Morris R. Wills, as told to J. Robert Moskin, *Turncoat: an American’s 12 Years in Communist China* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), p. 38.

<sup>27</sup>Lloyd W. Pate, as told to B. J. Cutler, *Reactionary!* (New York, 1956), pp. 34, 44, 51.

<sup>28</sup>Philip Deane, *I Was A Captive in Korea* (New York, 1953), p. 113. To cite all publica-

The same kinds of sources, supplemented again by the studies of research scientists and journalists, reveal that the physical duress to which prisoners allegedly succumbed so easily, presumably leading to widespread collaboration, ranged all the way from calculated manipulation of necessities of life to murder. One former prisoner labeled a reactionary by his captors told the author of many instances of physical brutality practiced by the Chinese. Among those brutalized were Chinese-appointed squad leaders who couldn't or wouldn't promote group compliance with the indoctrination program. Some, he maintained, were murdered. Others were subjected to severe beatings and then denied medical treatment for the injuries inflicted; death sometimes resulted. Some bad treatment, he declared, resulted from caprice, citing a case of one man in his squad, a "middleman" who underwent several nighttime beatings over a period of one month for no apparent reason.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, those who disparage prisoner behavior tend to take at face value the Chinese contention that they did not commit atrocities or torture their captives. An official U.S. Army report issued in June 1953, however, declared that after Chinese entrance into the war they were "fully as active as the North Koreans" in commission of war crimes.<sup>30</sup>

So far as the POW death rate, 38%, is concerned, this figure is speculative. It does not include atrocity deaths, which numbered over a thousand. Nor does it include well over two thousand missing in action. The Chinese kept no dependable records, and throughout much of the first year of the war the prisoners were in no position to do so themselves.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the true death rate, critics of the prisoners and of the alleged "softness" of American society see it as "too high." By implication they blame most of the deaths on prisoner negligence, or worse, on loss of will to live. Five

---

tions, autobiographical, scholarly or pertinent government documents which describe both positive and negative aspects of prisoner behavior would be impossible. A listing of useful titles, however, is in Albert Biderman, Barbara Heller and Paula Epstein, *A Selected Bibliography on Captivity Behavior* (Washington, D.C., Bureau of Social Science Research, 1961).

<sup>29</sup>The interviews were conducted by the author in 1966 on the campus of Oregon State University, Corvallis. The best catalog of the types of physical coercion employed against the prisoners is in William Peters, "More on Our POW's," *Reporter*, XX (Mar. 5, 1959), 39. See also, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations. Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Korean War Atrocities*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C., 1954), pp. 12-13. I have learned of no Americans who suffered the bamboo-splinters torture traditionally associated with Oriental captors. But one British naval officer was so tortured. See Dennis Lankford, *I Defy* (London, 1954), pp. 109-10.

<sup>30</sup>U.S. Department of the Army, War Crimes Division, Judge Advocate Section, Korean Communications Zone, *Extract of Interim Historical Report* (June 1953), p. 35. See also pp. 43-45, 49.

<sup>31</sup>Biderman, *March to Calumny*, pp. 93-101. This section deals with attempts to arrive at precise figures of American casualties.

prisoner physicians, however, reported otherwise shortly after the war. They wrote:

The erroneous impression has been created that prisoners of war who were in good physical health gave up and died; this is not true. Every prisoner of war in Korea who died had suffered from malnutrition, exposure to cold, and continued harassment by the Communists. Contributing causes to the majority of deaths were prolonged cases of respiratory infection and diarrhea. Under such conditions, it is amazing not that there was a high death rate, but that there was a reasonably good rate of survival.<sup>32</sup>

Another example of misuse of data to demonstrate weakness on the part of the POWs and their nurture is the “no escape” theme. While it is true that no American successfully escaped from permanent prison camps in the Yalu River region, several hundred did escape before permanent camps were established, some after several months of captivity. From these camps, furthermore, at least 46 verifiable escape attempts involving nearly 4% of the POWs have been authenticated.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, both Mayer and Kinkead have insisted that failure to escape from permanent camps is significant. Mayer, in one speech, praised American prisoners in the Philippines for attempting and completing escapes despite the Japanese practice of putting prisoners in blood-brother groups of ten. If one escaped the rest were to be shot. But, according to Weinstein, the POWs took the Japanese at their word and established MP patrols to halt just such escape attempts.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Clarence L. Anderson et al., “Medical Experiences in Communist POW Camps in Korea: Experiences and Observations of Five American Medical Officers Who Were Prisoners of War,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, CLVI (Sept. 11, 1954), 121. Dr. Anderson, however, appears to be of two minds on the prevalence and causes of “give-up-itis.” He later told Kinkead that it was one of the “worst problems” in one of the camps, Camp 5. He also leaned toward the interpretation that the POWs were a newer and weaker breed of Americans characterologically. See his analysis in Kinkead, *In Every War But One*, pp. 145, 148–49.

<sup>33</sup>Biderman, *March to Calumny*, pp. 52, 89. Chap. VI, pp. 84–90, “The Record of Escapes,” discusses this subject in detail.

<sup>34</sup>Mayer, “The New Weapon of Brainwashing,” transcript. Weinstein, *Barbed-Wire Surgeon*, p. 117. See also, Donald L. Baker, *Life-on-Rice* (New York, 1963), p. 26. It became apparent in the spring of 1968 that North Vietnam had taken advantage of public acceptance of contentions that “new breed” Americans lacked will and courage. On April 21 of that year an ABC television network late-news program showed a North Vietnamese film picturing security measures taken to prevent escape of some Americans confined in Hanoi. A coolly sarcastic English-speaking narrator pointed out the weak wooden doors, flimsy clasp locks and low walls surrounding the prison compound. The film then switched to a scene showing a captured airman being physically manhandled by angry civilians. The narrator’s words and meaning were plain. Really courageous prisoners would make escape attempts. That they would be recaptured and treated roughly by an indignant Vietnamese civilian populace should be expected. Nevertheless, the prisoners should try, if they had any manhood left.

The assumption of Turkish superiority in POW camps also rests on a misreading of evidence. Turkish prisoners were, in the first place, a select group of volunteers. Furthermore, half of them were captured after the worst period of captivity was over, the winter of 1950–51. Well over 80% of the American POWs were not so fortunate. Turkish prisoners, unlike the Americans, were not split up. Officers and enlisted men remained together most of the time, an aid to maintenance of discipline. Nor were the Turks the objects of intense re-education efforts as the Americans were. Yet, one Turk served on a peace committee. One refused to accept repatriation until he had a late change of heart. And some communist propaganda materials show Turkish involvement in communist-sponsored POW programs. In 1962, Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall (ret.), military historian and author of *The River and the Gauntlet* and *Pork Chop Hill*, bluntly told a Senate subcommittee that the Turks were overrated. Said Marshall, “The story about the Turks being perfect prisoners is a continuation of the fable that they were perfect soldiers in the line which was not true at all.”<sup>35</sup>

The assumption of Marine superiority to soldiers in prisoner-camp behavior also rests upon misreading of evidence. Marines may have retained more esprit de corps as prisoners, but they, like the Turks, were more of an elite unit. However, at Kangyye in 1951, some Marines made speeches, signed peace petitions (often with illegible signatures and wrong or misspelled names), and wrote articles for a “peace camp” paper called *The New Life*. Told by the Chinese that rewards for being a “good student” could include early release, some made up stories of hungry childhood and living on relief. Others said they joined the Corps in order to get decent food and clothing. Two described the criteria for a satisfactory article: “All you had to do was string stuff together in fairly coherent sentences such words as ‘warmongers’ . . . ‘Wall Street big shots’ . . . ‘capitalistic bloodsuckers’ and you had it made.” Eighteen Marines and one soldier who convinced the Chinese of their “sincerity” eventually were selected for early repatriation. Taken close to the front, they crossed up their captors by escaping ahead of schedule.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Military Cold War Education and Speech Review Policies, Hearings Before the Special Preparedness Subcommittee*, 87th Cong., 2nd. sess., 1962, III, 1242–43. Biderman, *March to Calumny*, pp. 159–62, gives the best concise summary of the Turkish performance, although nearly all other scholars writing on the subject of POW behavior have dealt with it too. For an interesting, highly technical study of the behavior of some groups of German POWs in Russian captivity during World War II, see Wilfred Olaf Reinert, *Conditional, Unconditional, and Longitudinal Collaboration: an Inquiry into the Dimensions of Prisoner-of-War Collaboration Behavior* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1967).

<sup>36</sup>Harold H. Martin, “They Tried to Make Our Marines Love Stalin,” *Saturday Evening Post* (Aug. 25, 1951), pp. 108–9.

The experience of the eighteen Marines is discussed in a University of Maryland history master's thesis on Marine POWs in Korea by Lt. Col. Angus MacDonald. MacDonald notes with disapproval that the Marines gave far more information to their captors than name, rank and serial number. But he correctly views these as gambits designed to secure release from captivity.<sup>37</sup> The Army, however, seems to have taken a less pragmatic, and, consequently, more humorless view of similar efforts by its enlisted men.<sup>38</sup> MacDonald, on the other hand, does not deal adequately with the joint investigations of all services which, when concluded, revealed that only 11% of the Army repatriates compared with 26% of the Marine repatriates warranted further investigation on possible misconduct charges. Instead he quotes with approval an address by Col. Mayer which praised Marine performance, and by implication, criticized that of Army POWs.<sup>39</sup> Eventually both services made the further investigations suggested, the Army possibly applying a broader set of standards to define misconduct, since it initially cleared only 58% of the 11% thought to warrant further investigation. The Marines cleared 94%. Finally, only fourteen cases came up for trial, all Army cases, out of which eleven convictions resulted.<sup>40</sup>

In view of the commonly accepted belief that the Marines performed better than soldiers as POWs, it is interesting to note the comment by retired Air Corps Major General Delmar T. Spivey in a John A. Lejeune Forum on prisoner behavior. In this Marine-sponsored forum, Spivey, who while imprisoned in Germany during World War II was senior officer in the Center Compound of Stalag III, made the un rebutted statement that:

Even with all these things ["survival courses, physical conditioning programs, instruction in our American heritage, information about the enemy, courses and exercises designed to instill pride and self-respect and belief in one's service and country, and the assurance that our country will stand by an individual, both in combat and as a prisoner"] . . . we cannot assume that every fighting man will be completely prepared for his responsibilities as a prisoner. History is not

<sup>37</sup>James Angus MacDonald Jr., "The Problems of U.S. Marine Corps Prisoners of War in Korea" (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1961). See pp. 60-84 of Chap. IV, "The Lenient Policy," and, particularly, pp. 68, 70, 84.

<sup>38</sup>See note 25 above.

<sup>39</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, *POW: the Fight Continues After the Battle*, p. 81. MacDonald, "Marine Corps Prisoners of War in Korea," pp. 236-37.

<sup>40</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, *POW: The Fight Continues After the Battle*, p. 82. "Misconduct in the Prison Camps: A Survey of the Law and an Analysis of the Korean Cases," *Columbia Law Review*, LVI (May 1956), 745-46, esp. note 256. Biderman, *March to Calumny*, p. 36.



on our side, and neither is human nature when we consider the past conduct of prisoners of war.<sup>41</sup>

The conclusions of professional and semi-professional scholars and writers about American POW behavior are mixed. Stanley Elkins in his search for suggestive experience to support his description of the effects of a closed system on slave psychological development turned to the POWs. Unfortunately he exaggerated some of the findings of his source, Edgar Schein, one scholar involved in the POW studies. Elkins wrote of "profound changes in behavior and values" being "effected without physical torture or extreme deprivation" and of "large numbers" of American informers and men who cooperated in the indoctrination program.<sup>42</sup> But Schein said only that mandatory discussion and mutual criticism sessions which followed communist indoctrination lectures probably created "considerable doubt concerning ideological position in some of the men." They were, as a whole, he declared, "not very effective." Nor did he give any estimates of the numbers of informers or cooperators relative to the total POW population.<sup>43</sup>

Betty Friedan has seen the average Korean prisoner as an "apathetic, dependent, infantile, purposeless being . . . a new American man . . . reminiscent of the familiar 'feminine' personality."<sup>44</sup> Edgar Friedenberg described the POW as a new model of being, but an international one, not just American. He wrote, "this sort of young man is a character in existentialist novels and post-World War II Italian films."<sup>45</sup> Miss Friedan, however, discovered parallels closer to home. She found them in the youth of the 1950s, in their "new passivity," bored and passionless, demonstrated variously in: the annual springtime collegiate riots at Fort Lauderdale; a teen-age call girl service in a Long Island suburb; adolescent grave defil-

<sup>41</sup>Robert B. Asprey, ed., "The Soldier and the Prisoner," *The John A. Lejeune Forum, Marine Corps Gazette*, IXL (May 1965), 40. Lt. Col. MacDonald and Col. James W. Keene, also of the Marines, were the other two participants in the Forum.

<sup>42</sup>*Slavery: a Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (New York [1963], 1959), note 99, p. 128.

<sup>43</sup>Edgar Schein, "Some Observations on Chinese Methods of Handling Prisoners of War," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XX (Spring 1956), 326. Schein does note that the Chinese were successful in controlling large numbers of prisoners and creating social disorganization which enabled them to undermine supports to belief, preparatory to attempts at indoctrination. Schein also postulates that the indoctrination attempts might have been more successful had the Chinese instructors known their captive students and their material better and had the student-instructor ratio been lower. The lower ratio he deems important based on evidence from mainland China where indoctrination seems to have worked best when "students" self-police each other in their quest for ideological purity. It is, of course, debatable whether American G.I. prisoners would engage in an ideological struggle in the same fashion as Chinese "enemies of the state."

<sup>44</sup>*The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963), p. 386.

<sup>45</sup>*The Vanishing Adolescent* (New York [1963], 1959), p. 214.



ing in Bergen County, New Jersey; drug-taking parties in Westchester County, New York, and Connecticut; and the "helpless, apathetic state" of the female student body at Sarah Lawrence College.<sup>46</sup>

It is doubtful whether the typical Korean POW would recognize himself in all this. His schooling averaged somewhat less than nine years. His social class was hardly comfortable middle. And his withdrawal from activity was certainly in part a shrewd way of fending off the ubiquitous Chinese indoctrinators.

Among historians, Walter Hermes, author of the second volume of a projected five-volume official history of the war, took note of the Kinkead book. But he accepted Biderman's view, calling it a "convincing rebuttal" of Kinkead's thesis.<sup>47</sup> Robert Leckie, however, relied heavily on Kinkead and called the POW record "sorry . . . the worst in American history." Apathy, he declared, was responsible for the failure of any men to escape. But in the same paragraph he asserted that the Caucasian appearance of the Americans was the "more likely reason for this failure."<sup>48</sup> T. R. Fehrenbach, too, has generally taken a dim view of the prisoners' behavior. "Chemistry and culture," the Doolittle Board's democratization reforms and American education, among other culprits, were at fault, he wrote. His analysis of sources, like Leckie's, was less than rigorous.<sup>49</sup>

Harry Middleton, while acknowledging that the percentage of collaborators was small, also looked askance at the prisoners' record. His book, though published later (1965) than Fehrenbach's narrative, displayed less acquaintance with or close reading of the available literature on the subject.<sup>50</sup> An English scholar, David Rees, in *Korea: the Limited War*, after devoting a lengthy chapter to the subject, leaned to the point of view that POW behavior was not unusual considering the fallible nature of man and considering the unique nature of the prisoners' experiences.<sup>51</sup> S. L. A. Marshall, a consultant to the Advisory Committee, is a defender

<sup>46</sup>Friedan, pp. 284–85. Who were the sources for social psychologist Friedan and educational psychologist Friedenber? Miss Friedan cited Kinkead. She cited Mayer. She cited Dr. Spock, who was presumably impressed by a Mayer speech. She cited Friedenber, who, predictably, cited Kinkead. It's not only historians who quote each other.

<sup>47</sup>Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington, D.C., 1966), pp. 496–97.

<sup>48</sup>*Conflict: the History of the Korean War, 1950–1953* (New York, 1962), pp. 389–90.

<sup>49</sup>*This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness* (New York, 1963), pp. 434–37, 461–68, 540–48. For an example of ambiguity in Fehrenbach cf. pp. 434 and 463. In the former he declared that the "Old Army," like that on Bataan, "exhausted and sick" in prison camp "would have spat upon its captors, despising them to the end." In the latter, however, he wrote "Americans and Britons in Japanese prisons retreated into dream worlds, and some informed on their buddies."

<sup>50</sup>*The Compact History of the Korean War* (New York, 1965), pp. 211–14.

<sup>51</sup>*Korea: the Limited War* (London, 1964), p. 346.

of the prisoners.<sup>52</sup> And Russell Weigley in his *History of the United States Army* also concluded that the Korean POWs were not a discredit to the nation.<sup>53</sup>

In 1962, 21 scholars familiar with the POW behavior materials signed a paper entitled "Statement: to Set Straight the Korean POW Episode." This paper, drawn up by two of the signers, Edgar Schein and Raymond Bauer, who had worked extensively on the subject, directly refuted the popular version of the POW story expounded by Kinkead and Mayer. The "Statement" included these challenging assertions:

The behavior of the Korean prisoners did not compare unfavorably with that of their countrymen or with the behavior of people of other nations who have faced similar trials in the past.

Instances of moral weakness, collaboration with the enemy, and failure to take care of fellow soldiers in Korea did not occur more frequently than in other wars where comparable conditions of physical and psychological hardship were present. Indeed, such instances appear to have been *less* prevalent than historical experience would lead us to expect.

. . . . .

It is our opinion that any serious analysis of American society, its strengths and weaknesses, should rest on historically correct data. It is unfortunate that the Korean POW episode has been distorted to make the case for one view of American society. We hope that this Statement will be the first step toward setting the historical facts of this episode straight.<sup>54</sup>

Historically correct data, however, were insufficient for many Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. They seemed to feel that any communist success at eliciting collaborative behavior or inducing ideological doubt among any American soldiers, no matter how small the number, signified a general American failure. Such failure to them was not to be taken lightly. It might reflect, after all, the existence of a more dangerous cancer in the American character than even they had suspected.

What is really "new in history," then, about the whole Korean POW episode?

First, never before Korea were American POWs confronted by a captor who worked hard to change their ideological persuasion. This point is worth a brief examination. Had American POWs of the Germans, for instance, been subjected to ideological thought reform efforts designed to inculcate virulent racist attitudes or to inculcate the idea that Germany

<sup>52</sup> Marshall signed the "statement" cited below in the text.

<sup>53</sup> (New York, 1967), pp. 520–21.

<sup>54</sup> This formal statement is found in Albert Biderman, "The Dangers of Negative Patriotism," *Harvard Business Review*, XL (Nov. 1962), 93–99.

was fighting the West's battle against communism, had these efforts taken place over the length of time and under circumstances comparable to those endured by the Korean POWs, there might be a rough basis for comparison. But those American POWs weren't so subjected. Dobran did report some anti-Semitism among his POW group upon which the Germans might have capitalized.<sup>55</sup> But one can speculate a little in the other direction that the American reaction to this divisive ploy might have been similar to that in one group of Negro POWs in Korea among whom the Chinese tried to foment ideological change by hammering upon the existence of racial discrimination in the United States. Wrote Lloyd Pate, "A few colored guys got up and said it was our business what we did in the United States and for the Chinks to mind their own damn business."<sup>56</sup>

Second, never before had the American public been so gullible as to believe that such a chimera as the enemy's self-proclaimed "lenient policy" was, in fact, lenient. During the first year of the war in particular the Chinese and North Koreans, often in systematic fashion, fostered brutalizing captivity conditions which were in significant part responsible for prisoner behavior which did not measure up to "ideal" standards.

And, finally, for the first time the public seemed to assume that such selfish undisciplined behavior as existed among the POWs was something new in American military experience and that it was a direct consequence of a characterological deterioration in the nation itself.

Whether or not such a deterioration has been taking place in American society, from the advent of the New Deal and the impact of progressive education as the critics strongly imply, is not under contention here. What is being contended, rather, is that if one really believes this and wants evidence to prove it, one will have to find examples other than among those Americans who died and those who survived in the prison camps of North Korea, 1950–53.

<sup>55</sup>Dobran, p. 62. See also former Alabama governor George Wallace's remark to a German-born American in Pittsburgh. "I'm sorry it was necessary for us to fight against those anti-communist nations [Germany and Japan]. I thought back then, Hell, we should have been in those trenches with the Germans, with yawl, fightin' them Bolsheviks." Marshall Frady, "George Wallace: the Angry Man's Candidate," *Saturday Evening Post* (June 29, 1968), pp. 47–48.

<sup>56</sup>Pate, p. 67.

